

## Always Say Never – Acts 24-25:12

Acts 24. The Apostle Paul has just gone through his second ad hoc trial in Jerusalem, the second of 5, and now finds himself in Caesarea to face another one.

And in it, we find 5 “never” principles. I know your mom told you to never say never, but these would be exceptions. Always. Starting in v1. **(Outline)**

[1] *And after five days the high priest Ananias came down [from Jerusalem] with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus [probably a lawyer]. They laid before the governor [Felix] their case against Paul. [2] And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: “Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, [3] in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude [brown-nosing flattery at its worst].*

*And disingenuous; because the rule and reign of Felix was fraught with unrest; and he was hated by the Jews.*

*[4] But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. [5] For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.*

Referring to those who followed Jesus the Nazarene. Because he was from Nazareth. Paul’s a ringleader Tertullus says.

*[6] He even tried to profane the temple [pollute it], but we seized him. [8] By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.” [9] The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.*

It’s a perfect example of the fact that just because someone says something, and just because others agree, doesn’t make it true. Paul didn’t do those things.

But the crowd believed them. Because they jumped to conclusions before they knew the facts. Leading us to the first *principle*.

### Never jump to conclusions (v9)

Look at v9 again. *The Jews also joined in the charge* [the Jews in Caesarea, who didn’t have a *clue* about the facts], *affirming that all these things were so.*

“Yep, it’s true. He’s guilty. Read it on Facebook. Saw it on a blog.”

“Heard it from a friend who, heard it from a friend who, heard it from another . . .”

They jumped to conclusions. Because that’s what we do.

Especially when an accusation fits our preconceived notions.

“Police officers are bad, so if someone accuses them of something wrong, they must be guilty.” It’s a preconceived notion that causes people to jump to conclusions.

Or how about a victim mentality. “My problems or my plight, are your fault. And if somebody else has problems, they’re your fault too.”

It’s a victim mentality that causes us to jump to conclusions.

Or how about identity politics? Jumping to conclusions about someone, or opposing them, not because of what they say or stand for, but because they’re different.

Or they don’t match your preferred attribute. Like your race, or nationality, or sexual orientation, or gender identity.

That’s the case with the Jews here.

They jumped to conclusions about *Paul*, because he wasn’t like them anymore. He was Christian. Identity politics to the core. Just like today.

Where some people jump to conclusions about us.

Just make sure it’s not the other way around. For *any* reason. Preconceived notions or otherwise. Either get the facts, or let it go. But never jump to conclusions. **(Summary)**

➤ [10] *And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.*

In other words, given your experience with people who jump to conclusions, I’m happy to tell you my side of the story.

*[11] You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem [hardly enough time to muster a following], [12] and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. [13] Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me.*

Not only are their accusations *false*, but they have no *proof* even if they were true.

So they ought to be ashamed of making them on two counts.

*[14] But this I confess to you, that according to the Way [the Gospel; the way of Jesus], which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, [15] having a hope in God [faith in him], which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. [No doubt a reference to **Daniel 12:2**. That says . . .]*

*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

We all accept this Paul says. Even though the Sadducees didn’t think it was a *physical* resurrection.\*\*\*\*\*

V16. And this is the verse from which our point comes. *[16] So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. [I’ll come back to it.]*

*[17] Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings [probably referring to the offering he collected among the Macedonian churches, for the church in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8-9)]. [18] While I was doing this [presenting the offering], they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult.*

*But some Jews from Asia—[19] they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me [any proof]. [20] Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, [21] other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day [the resurrection of Jesus].’”*

*[22] But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off [Paul’s accusers], saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.” [23] Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.*

The second point here, for *our* lives, is . . .

## Never harbor sin (v16)

Always keep a clear conscience. *V16 – I always take pains* [Paul said] *to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.* Zero guilt. A clean slate. Complete integrity. He takes *pains* to that end. Goes to great lengths. Does whatever it takes. To never allow something to fester. Never harbor sin.

Why? Because it puts us out of sorts with God, and out of sorts with others.

Out of sorts with God, because when there's sin in our heart, it comes between us. And disrupts the peace and joy of our relationship.

And out of sorts with others, because when we hold something against them, we don't want to be around them. Or we're miserable when we are.

Never harbor sin because it puts you out of sorts with God and out of sorts with others.

And worst of all, subjects us to judgment. Failing to forgive someone of an offense, pollutes your conscience, negates the sacrifice of Christ . . .

And leads to a fearful expectation of judgment. Heb 10:26.

*For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, [27] but a fearful expectation of judgment.*

That's how serious it is. Which is why Paul says, *I always take pains to have a clear conscience.* Never harbor sin. (Summary)

➤ [24] *After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish* [his third wife; and her second marriage; a union full of so much sin and deceit it would qualify as a soap opera; from extra-biblical sources], *and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus* [wow], [25] *And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."*

The word for *reasoned* there in v25, means "explained and discussed." They talked about it. That the Gospel has ethical implications; like righteousness and self-control.

And *apart* from the Gospel, *apart* from faith in Jesus and a life that shows it, we face judgment. They reasoned about *the coming judgment*.

Which *alarmed* Felix, frightened him; and rightfully so.

Because his life and marriage were anything *but* righteous and self-controlled.

Like we find in v26.

[26] *At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.* [Wow. Talk about a heart becoming hardened by the deceit of sin. Alarmed one day and calloused the next.] [27] *When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.* [He didn't release him on his way out.]

There are 2 points of application in these verses, from two perspectives. The first is Paul's.

## Never shrink back (v24-26)

Paul stood before a man who had the power of life and death over him. And instead of stroking him, he confronted him.

Instead of *tickling* his ears, he accosted them. Instead of *diluting* the Gospel to make it more palatable, he said it like it is – including both love and judgment; grace and sin.

Instead of shrinking back, he stood firm.

I love the example of **Hugh Latimer** on this point.

Hugh Latimer was an English Reformer in the early 1500's, who was excommunicated from the Catholic church after refusing to back down in his belief and preaching . . . About salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Around the *same* time, Henry the VIII, the *king* of England, separated from the Catholic church *himself*, over their refusal to annul his first marriage. Good for them.

Not to mention their refusal to annul his second, third, fourth, and fifth marriages.

And eventually their paths met. Latimer rose to the position of *preaching* to Henry VIII.

And *one* Sunday morning, he preached from Heb 13:4. Which says . . .

*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.*

And after applying it to the King and his marriages, Henry VIII was so angry, he sent him away, and told Latimer to come back next week with an apology.

So he did. Except he preached the exact *same* message, from the exact same text.

The kind of thing that got him burned at the stake several years later.\*\*\*\*\*

Never shrink back. Even if it means incurring the judgment of men.

Better that, than the judgment of God. That's the first point from these verses.

➤ The second, from the perspective of Felix, is . . .

## Never put God off (v25)

Felix listened to Paul *speak about faith in Christ Jesus*, but at the very moment he was convicted *about righteousness and self-control* and judgment, Felix put him off. (25) *"Go away."* He put *Paul* off in order to put *God* off. Wanting to avoid the truth and relieve his conviction any way he could.

The result of which, was a hardening of Felix's heart. So that the only reason he *sent* for Paul was to get a bribe. For 2 years!

How do you listen to the Gospel over and over again, with an impure motive in your heart, if you're not hard of heart? You don't. And we're not exempt.

In fact, it's the first of 3 reasons to never put God off.

A. **Rejection leads to hardness.** The more you say "no," the easier it gets. Kind of like lying.

B. **Procrastination leads to numbness.** Like those God calls into missions. The longer they procrastinate, the more numb they are to his leading. *Comfortably* numb.

C. **Deferral leads to silence.** You might not *hear* from him again. Either by choice or circumstances.

If you put God off, you may never again have the *opportunity* to respond.

So when he calls, when he convicts, never put him off. Whether it's his call to save you or send you; use you or grow you. (Summary)

➤ And then last, the last principle, comes from v1-12 of chapter 25.

[1] *Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province* [replacing Felix], *he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.* [2] *And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul* [again; 2 years running], *and they urged him* [Festus], [3]

asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way [apparently more had joined in the plot].

[4] Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. [5] “So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.”

[6] After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. [7] When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove [déjà vu all over again].

[8] Paul argued in his defense, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.” [9] But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?” [As if it was an honest question.] [10] But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. [In other words, I don’t belong in Jerusalem more than a man on the moon.]

[11] If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death [I should get what I deserve]. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” [Something any Roman citizen could do. But it came with risks; risks of indefinite delay if he didn’t want to see you; or risk of death if he didn’t like the looks of you. But recognizing the intent of the Jews, Paul had nothing to lose.] [12] Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

The final point I want to commend to you, is . . .

### **Never bow to injustice (25:6-12)**

Paul was unjustly accused, and was being influenced toward an unjust trial. Neither of which he bowed to. Arguing in v8 . . .

“Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.”

He didn’t equivocate, he didn’t back down, and he didn’t self-deprecate; trying to appease them. He held his ground.

If there’s *truth* to accusations made against you, own it. But if there’s not, if there’s *no* truth to it, or you’re being unfairly treated like Paul . . .

Or unjustly singled out like so many in our day – from Christian bakers and Christian florists, to Christian photographers and Christian employers – don’t.

*Don’t* bow to that kind of pressure. *Don’t* bow to that injustice. It just encourages those who plot against us all the more.

And if you think all that stuff is a long way off and a long way from Iowa, think again.

Because people in our church have *already* encountered it.

From those who own businesses, to those who are employed.

They’ve *already* encountered injustice. *Already* encountered false accusations. *Already* encountered unjust treatment. And so have we as a church. It’s here.

And more is coming. Especially with the mindset expressed by some of the presidential candidates a few days ago.

Saying that they think churches should be stripped of their tax exempt status, if they don’t affirm homosexuality, gay marriage, and transgenderism. True.

And lest you think that would never happen because it would take an act of Congress, think again.

Because the IRS pulled the tax exempt status of Bob Jones University back in the 80’s, of their own accord; their own decision. And the Supreme Court supported it.

Injustice is *not* a long way off. It’s already here, and more is coming.

And if you wait until it affects *you* to say never, or until it affects someone *close* to you, it’s too late. **(Summary)**

Instead of *justice* rolling down like waters, injustice will. And we’ll be *forced* to bow.

So whatever you do – whether it’s harboring sin, shrinking back, or putting God off – always, always, say never.

Prayer – God, help us in these things. And forgive us for succumbing. Forgive us for jumping to conclusions. Forgive us for not caring about injustice. Sensitize us to your call. Embolden us with your truth. And strengthen us to stand.